

Washington, DC — Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) successfully passed an amendment he introduced to H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act, which will provide loan forgiveness for Head Start teachers.

“Head Start teachers provide critical services at a time when we need children ready to learn when they enter kindergarten,” stated Congressman Sestak. “This amendment recognizes the significant role that Head Start teachers play by ensuring that the more than 55,000 teachers currently employed by Head Start have a means of getting their bachelor’s degree their loan burden.”

The rising cost of higher education is a concern for many students and families, and repaying student loans is becoming increasingly burdensome. Today, the typical student graduates with approximately \$19,000 in student loan debt. Given that the average annual salary for a Head Start teacher is only \$24,000 a year, this debt is often too burdensome for these teachers to bear. As a result, Head Start teachers face unmanageable debt, forcing them to forego an advanced degree or leave their profession in order to repay their student loans.

Specifically, this amendment provides loan forgiveness of up to \$10,000 for Head Start and Early Head Start teachers upon completion of a Bachelor’s degree, who will commit to working in a Head Start or Early Head Start program for at least three consecutive years.

H.R. 1429 calls for increased qualifications in the Head Start workforce, with 50 percent of headstart teachers nationwide to hold a bachelor’s degree by 2013. This amendment provides the means to help reach this goal, by offering one way of helping current Head Start teachers upgrade their qualifications as well as to encourage future and current students to enter this important field of teaching.

“Head Start teachers are so critical at the time of a child’s cognitive reasoning development, and this amendment recognizes this by ensuring that the more than 55,000 Head Start teachers have a means of getting their bachelor’s degree by forgiving their student loan burden,” added Joe.

Earlier this spring, Congressman Sestak held an Education Summit, with Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller, which brought together over 300 educators, parents, students, administrators, and policy makers to discuss education issues surrounding Early

Childhood, special education, and Elementary and Secondary Education.

During the Education Summit's panel discussion on early childhood education, Congressman Sestak's panelists and guests discussed the need to address issues pertaining to Head Start, including continued support of parental involvement in local Head Start policy councils and extending eligibility of Head Start for families up to 130 percent of the poverty level. A resounding concern by both early childhood experts and educators was regarding the need to provide and retain high quality Head Start teachers, who serve our country's most disadvantaged, low-income children.

As a result of this discussion, Congressman Sestak worked with Chairman Miller to incorporate parental involvement in local Head Start policy councils and to extend the eligibility of Head Start families into H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act. Today's amendment is the fruition of the summit's discussion on recruiting and retaining Head Start teachers.

"This amendment will ensure that we are able to recruit and retain a qualified workforce for our nation's Head Start programs, and I am particularly proud that the idea was generated at my education summit to improve the quality and accessibility of our nation's education system," stated Congressman Sestak.

The amendment passed the House by a vote of 312 to 107 and has since been referred to the Senate where it awaits further action.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

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